

Poll shows little change on marriage, but more support for other gay rights

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WASHINGTON (ABP) — Results from a Gallup poll released May 27 show that a majority of Americans continue to oppose same-sex marriage — but that the youngest voters support equal marriage rights for homosexual couples by a wide margin.

And support for other gay-rights issues is much higher among the public at large, including overwhelming majorities in favor of homosexuals serving openly in the military, some domestic-partnership rights and adding sexual orientation to existing federal hate-crimes statutes.

The survey results — the latest set of data from a poll on beliefs and values Gallup conducts each May — showed 57 percent of Americans oppose legal recognition of same-sex marriage, while 40 percent support it. Those figures are virtually unchanged from last year.

Levels of support and opposition to same-sex marriage have remained fairly close to those same figures every year since 2004, when Gallup began asking the question annually. Gay marriage support reached its peak — and opposition its low point — in 2007, with 46 percent supportive and 53 percent opposed.

But, as previous polls have shown on the topic, younger respondents are far more supportive of gay marriage than their elders. While all age groups surveyed except for 18-29 year-olds opposed same-sex marriage by large margins, the youngest group supported marriage rights for gays by a margin virtually opposite that of the nation as a whole. Fifty-nine percent of

18-29 year-olds support same-sex marriage, while only 37 percent oppose it.

On other rights advances for which many gay groups have pushed, the poll found support among the populace at large either increased over last year or remained statistically constant. Fifty-six percent believed same-sex relations between consenting adults should be legal, while 40 percent said they should be illegal.

On two gay-rights issues whose fate is currently before Congress, the poll showed overwhelming public support. More than two-thirds of respondents — 69 percent — believed the military should repeal its ban on openly gay service members. That figure is significantly higher than the approximately 43 percent polls consistently showed approving of openly gay servicemen and women in 1993, when President Clinton first proposed repealing the Pentagon's gay ban.

President Obama also promised to repeal the ban in his election campaign, but so far has not devoted significant political capital to pushing legislation that would do so.

On another controversial issue in Congress, the poll showed strong public support for the gay-rights position. Sixty-seven percent of respondents favored adding sexual orientation as a protected class to federal hate-crimes statutes. Those laws already provide additional penalties for crimes motivated by bias against the victim's race, national origin or religion.

Additionally 73 percent of respondents favored inheritance rights for gays and lesbians when their life partners die, and 67 percent said same-sex domestic partners should have access to their significant other's health coverage and other employee benefits.

"While Americans have become increasingly likely to believe that the law should not discriminate against gay individuals and gay couples, the public

still seems reluctant at this point to extend those protections to the institution of marriage,” Gallup’s [press release](#) analyzing the results concluded. “Public support for gay marriage appears to have stalled in the last two years, even as the gay marriage movement has scored a number of legal and legislative victories at the state level in the past year.”

In recent weeks, state legislatures in Vermont and Maine and the highest court in Iowa have legalized same-sex marriage in those states. Bills that would do the same are currently being considered by legislators in New Hampshire and New York and city council members in the District of Columbia. Connecticut and Massachusetts already allowed same-sex marriage.

The Gallup poll of 1,015 adults was conducted May 7-10. Earlier data sets released from the survey revealed that Americans seemed to be trending in a more [conservative direction](#) on several divisive social issues, [including](#) abortion rights and embryonic stem-cell research.

-Robert Marus is managing editor and Washington bureau chief for Associated Baptist Press.

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